

Approved For Release 2004/01/16 : CIA-RDP75-00149R000500440001-1

NOVEMBER 1964

CUBA, CASTRO AND JOHN F. KENNEDY

By

CHARLES W. FERGUSON

WILLIAM F. FERGUSON

Approved For Release 2004/01/16 : CIA-RDP75-00149R000500440001-1

The fortunes of the United States in the last four years have been curiously bound to the fortunes of Cuba—that troubled, semitropical island 90 miles from our shores.

Month in, month out, Cuba has been a severe testing ground on which American policies and American policy-makers have been shaped and pounded and shaken apart.

In this timely and revealing article Richard Nixon discloses how the Cuban issue affected his career and that of John F. Kennedy. He offers fresh insight on the several crises which brought this country close to war; on the issues of the 1960 Presidential campaign, and on the issues of 1964.

Few men have had more experience in foreign policy than the former Vice President. The story he tells is personal, political and completely absorbing. His reflections on our past and present problems deserve thoughtful reading by every American.

Cuba, Castro and John F. Kennedy

ON APRIL 19, 1959, I met for the first and only time the man who was to be the major foreign-policy issue of the 1960 Presidential campaign; who was destined to be a hero in the warped mind of Lee Harvey Oswald, President Kennedy's assassin; and who in 1964 is still a major campaign issue.

The man, of course, was Fidel Castro. It is safe to say that no other individual in the world has created such a conflict of opinion in the United States. Many foreign-policy experts strongly support Sen. J. William Fulbright's view that Castro is merely "a nuisance but not a grave threat to the United States." The opposing view, which I share, is that Castro is a dangerous threat to our peace and security—and that we cannot tolerate the presence of his communist regime 90 miles from our shores. The primary evidence which caused me to reach this conclusion was provided by Castro himself in the conversation I had with him more than five years ago.

It was a Sunday afternoon, and there was nothing I wanted less to do than to go down to my Capitol office for a meeting with the new Cuban dictator. But there were special circumstances which prompted

me to schedule the appointment.

Castro had come to power in Cuba a little more than three months before. He was now in Washington at the invitation of the American Society of Newspaper Editors. Because his visit was unofficial, and because he had been making violent anti-American statements, President Eisenhower had declined to see him.

Since I had had considerable experience in dealing with Latin American problems and because they thought some special treatment might change Castro's unfriendly attitude, our ambassador to Cuba, Philip Bonsal, and Secretary of State Christian Herter urged me to meet with him. I agreed, on the condition that the two of us would talk alone, without members of his staff or mine present, and that there should be no photographs taken or other attempts made to exploit our conference for publicity purposes. It seemed to me that until he demonstrated some intention of modifying his anti-American stand he should not be accorded the same treatment I would give to other visiting foreign officials.

Apart from the beard and the battle-fatigue uniform which are now his trademarks, Castro was one of the most striking foreign officials I met during my eight years as Vice

284

CUBA, CASTRO AND JOHN F. KENNEDY

President. As I told President Eisenhower later, he seemed to have that indefinable quality which, for good or evil, makes a leader of men.

He had a compelling, intense voice, sparkling black eyes, and he radiated vitality. After 3½ hours of discussion I summed up my impressions in this way—he looked like a revolutionary, talked like an idealistic college professor and reacted like a communist. He was intelligent, shrewd, at times eloquent. He gave an *appearance* of sincerity, but what he said followed a pattern all too familiar to me. I had had conversations with many communist leaders abroad and in the United States. The answers to questions came back almost parrotlike from them, as they now did from Castro.

Q. Why don't you have free elections?

A. The people of Cuba don't want free elections; they produce bad government.

Q. Why don't you give fair trials to those whom you charge oppose the revolution?

A. The people of Cuba don't want them to have fair trials. They want them shot as quickly as possible.

Q. Aren't you afraid the communists in your government will eventually take it over?

A. I am not afraid of the communists; I can handle them.

I made no headway in attempting to convince him that international communism is more than just an economic and political idea and that its agents are dangerously effective

in their ability to grasp power and to set up dictatorships.

At the conclusion of our conference I wrote a four-page secret memorandum, and sent copies to President Eisenhower, Secretary Herter and Allen Dulles, head of the Central Intelligence Agency. My conclusion was, "Castro is either incredibly naïve about communism or is under communist discipline."

In the weeks immediately after Castro left Washington, several spirited policy discussions on Cuba took place within the Eisenhower administration. The majority view in the State Department was in sharp disagreement with my appraisal of Castro. Most of the career foreign-policy experts argued vigorously that Castro was "liberal" but that, despite some communist associations, he definitely was not a communist. Their view prevailed over mine at the outset, and their recommendations were followed. From that day to this, the lack of a firm and consistent policy toward Castro has caused the United States to accept a continuing series of defeats, permitting our avowed enemies to become entrenched in the Western Hemisphere.

Castro presented a complex problem from the very start. He had come to power with the tacit support and encouragement of the majority of the foreign-policy experts in the State Department, as well as with the enthusiastic approval of powerful elements of the American press. Cuba at that time, after years

286

CUBA, CASTRO AND JOHN F. KENNEDY

of Batista's misrule, was in need of a revolution. The tragedy was that Castro turned up as its leader. The mistake made by some of our gullible State Department officials and by certain influential columnists and editorial writers was that they failed to recognize the real problem we faced. Our choice was not between Batista and somebody better, but between Batista and somebody far worse.

It was not long before President Eisenhower began to realize that the original appraisal of Castro was wrong. Within months, bloody purges, illegal confiscations of property and Moscow-line attacks on the United States completely unmasked Castro and exposed him for what he really is.

By early 1960 President Eisenhower reached the conclusion that Castro was an agent of international communism and a menace to peace in this hemisphere. In a top-secret meeting in his office, at which I was present, he authorized the CIA to organize and train Cuban exiles for the eventual purpose of freeing their homeland from Castro's communist rule.

Six months later, on October 21, 1960, just four years ago, it was the Castro issue which forced me to make the most difficult and, as it turned out, the most costly decision of my political career.

Castro in the 1960 Campaign

I was in my suite in the Waldorf-Astoria in New York, preparing for

the fourth and last of my television debates with John F. Kennedy. The subject was to be foreign policy, an area in which most observers considered me to have the advantage because of my wider experience in that field. But the headlines in the afternoon papers forced me to make a critical decision which put me at a serious disadvantage in discussing the major foreign-policy issue of the 1960 campaign.

The issue was then, as it is in 1964, what should be American policy toward Castro's communist government in Cuba. For several weeks Kennedy had been criticizing our administration's policy without making specific recommendations as to how it should be changed. A few days earlier, in a speech before the American Legion Convention in Miami Beach, I had gained the initiative on the issue by calling for a quarantine of the Castro regime and setting forth a specific program to accomplish that objective. And now, just before we were to debate this issue face-to-face on television before 70 million voters, Kennedy counter-attacked. Eight-column headlines in the afternoon papers read: KENNEDY ADVOCATES U.S. INTERVENTION IN CUBA; CALLS FOR AID TO REBEL FORCES IN CUBA.

In his statement he declared, "We must attempt to strengthen the non-Batista, democratic, anti-Castro forces in exile and in Cuba itself who offer eventual hope of overthrowing Castro. Thus far, these fighters for freedom have had vir-

tually no support from our government."

As I finished reading the story, I realized the difficulty of the decision I had to make. For months I had known that we had been doing exactly what Kennedy seemed to be advocating—supporting and training Cuban exiles so that they could free Cuba from communist control. But this was a top-secret CIA project. I was one of only three members of the President's cabinet who had been briefed on it, and the irony was that I had been the strongest and most persistent advocate for setting up and supporting such a program.

Now the question was, *did* John Kennedy know of the existence of the project? President Eisenhower had instructed Allen Dulles, head of the CIA, to brief the Democratic candidate on all operations, including top-secret operations. I knew that Kennedy had already received two briefings from Dulles. I immediately had a member of my staff call the White House on the security line to ask if these briefings covered Cuba. A member of the White House staff indicated they had. (Several months after the election, Allen Dulles was to state that his briefing of Kennedy had included Cuba but not the training program for Cuban exiles.) At the time of the debate, however, and after checking with the White House, I had to proceed on the assumption that Kennedy had been briefed on the secret program.

I was faced with a heads-he-wins, tails-I-lose proposition. If in the TV debate I were to reveal the existence of the training program and point out that I had been one of its strongest advocates, I would pull the rug out from under Kennedy's position. But if I did so, the project would be doomed, and also the lives of brave men, both inside and outside of Cuba, who were receiving training and assistance.

Decisive Consideration: Security

I HAD only one choice: to protect the security of the program, I had to oppose Kennedy on his position of advocating that the United States openly aid anti-Castro forces inside and outside Cuba.

The decision was right from the standpoint of the country. It was wrong politically. When the television debate was concluded, Kennedy emerged as the man who was advocating a "get-tough policy" toward Castro. I was the man who was "soft" on Castro—the exact opposite of the truth.

Any number of factors could have made the difference in what was to be the closest Presidential election in history, where a shift of less than one-half a vote a precinct would have changed the result. Most observers agree that our positions on the Cuban issue could well have been the decisive factor. But I have never had any regrets about this decision, or any doubt that it was the only one I could make under the circumstances.

1964

CUBA, CASTRO AND JOHN F. KENNEDY

289

On April 19, 1961, three months after President Kennedy's inauguration, I flew to Washington from my home state of California, to which I had returned to practice law after 14 years in government service. I was scheduled to make a foreign-policy speech in Chicago the following week, and I had written Allen Dulles to ask that he brief me on some of the latest developments. President Kennedy readily gave his approval; I had an appointment to meet with Dulles at six o'clock on the afternoon of the 19th.

The appointment was to be in my Washington home. I arrived there from the airport shortly before six, to find a message from the CIA that Dulles would be delayed for at least an hour. It was after 7:30 before the doorbell rang, and I went to greet him.

The Bay of Pigs

I HAD known and worked with Allen Dulles since the summer of 1947 when he was one of the advisers to the Herter Committee, of which I was a member. The minute I saw him I realized that he was under great emotional stress. I asked him if he would like a drink. Completely out of character for the smooth, cool professional I had seen handle so many difficult situations through the years, he answered, "I certainly would. I really need one. This is the worst day of my life!"

I asked, "What's wrong?" He replied, "Everything is lost. The Cuban invasion is a total failure."

I had known, of course, that the invasion was in progress, but it never crossed my mind that it would be allowed to fail.

Dulles now filled me in on the details. After the election, before President Kennedy took office in January, Dulles had briefed him completely on the training program. The President-elect had indicated that he felt the program should go forward, and said he would follow through on it after his inauguration.

But, as had happened in the Eisenhower administration, a sharp difference of opinion about Castro developed among President Kennedy's advisers. One group of activists urged him to go forward with the invasion plan. His liberal advisers from the State Department and on his personal staff took the line that if American support of the invasion became known, world opinion would react unfavorably. This group advised that the United States should either try to get along with Castro or find some other method for dealing with him.

President Kennedy finally overruled his soft-line advisers and decided to go forward with the plan.

"It took great courage," Dulles told me, "for the President to overrule some of his advisers and order the invasion to proceed." But in the end the soft-liners won their point and, by last-minute compromises, doomed the operation to failure. More concerned with an adverse reaction from "world opinion" than with the threat of communism in

290

THE READER'S DIGEST

November

the Western Hemisphere, they persuaded the President to curtail the original concept of the operation. Two of the three Free Cuban air strikes designed to knock out Castro's air force were canceled, depriving the invasion of air support.* The result was a disaster both for the Cuban Freedom Fighters and for the United States. We got the blame for intervening; we were denied the credit we would have received for winning; and Castro was more firmly entrenched than ever.

President Kennedy's Reaction

THE NEXT DAY, April 20, when I returned to my home after a visit to the Capitol, I found a note by the telephone, left by my 15-year-old daughter, Patricia. It read: "President Kennedy has tried to reach you several times in the last hour. Please call the White House operator."

I placed the call, and the operator put the President on immediately. His voice was tense but friendly as he said, "Dick, could you drop by to see me? Any time will be all right. I have appointments with Dick Russell and with members of the Cuban Revolutionary Council, but otherwise my calendar is free this afternoon." I told him that I would be at his office at four o'clock and would be available to see him at any time his schedule permitted.

I was escorted into the President's private office a few minutes after I

arrived at the White House. I hadn't been in that historic oval room since I had said good-by to President Eisenhower there on January 19, three months before. The President was standing at his desk talking with Vice President Johnson. "Lyndon is going down to see if he can't get the Mexicans to support us on this Cuban business. I have just told him to tell the Mexicans they owe us a vote. Don't you think we should be tough with them?"

I replied, "Well, the Mexicans often take the soft line where the communists are concerned, because of the Cárdenas influence, but they need us as much or more than we need them today, and this is one time when I think we should insist that they stand with us." Shortly thereafter, Johnson left the room, and the President sat down in his famous rocking chair. He proceeded to give his reactions to the events of the past few days.

"I have just come from a meeting with the members of the Cuban Revolutionary Council," he said. "Several of those who were there had lost their sons, brothers or other close relatives or friends in this action. Talking to them and seeing the tragic expressions on their faces was the worst experience of my life."

"Last night," he continued, "they were really mad at us. But today they have calmed down a lot and, believe it or not, they are ready to go out and fight again, if we will give them the word and the support."

*See "Decision for Disaster: At Last—The Truth About the Bay of Pigs," *The Reader's Digest*, September '64.

1964

CUBA, CASTRO AND JOHN F. KENNEDY

291

Kennedy did not try to hide his frustration, disappointment and fury over the failure of the operation. Pacing around the room and using his down-to-earth Irish, rather than his Harvard vocabulary, he told me how disappointed he had been in the advice he had received.

"I was assured by everyone I checked with—all the military experts and the CIA—that the plan would succeed." Over and over again, he reiterated the fact that these assurances had been given to him. He did not mention the fatal advice—given him by some of his liberal State Department and White House advisers—to cancel the two air strikes—and, in effect, destroy the plan.

Finally he put the key question to me, bluntly and directly: "What would you do now in Cuba?"

"I would find a proper legal cover and I would go in," I answered. I suggested three possible legal justifications for taking such action: 1. A new definition of aggression, based on the premise that Soviet-bloc equipment was used by the Castro forces, and that we had an obligation to see that the Freedom Forces were at least equally supplied. 2. Send American forces in under our treaty right because of the potential threat to Guantánamo. 3. Send American forces in to protect the lives and rights of the several thousand American citizens still living in Cuba. I emphasized that I felt we must do whatever was necessary to rid Cuba of Castro and communism.

Kennedy heard me out without comment, and then replied, "Both Walter Lippmann (who had recently had an interview with Khrushchev) and Chip Bohlen (who had been our ambassador to Moscow) have reported that Khrushchev is in a very cocky mood at this time. If their appraisal is correct, he may believe this is the time to move against us and he might seize upon any action on our part in Cuba as an excuse for doing so. This means that there is a good chance that, if we move on Cuba, Khrushchev will move on Berlin. I just don't think we can take the risk, in the event their appraisal is correct."

Our conversation then turned briefly to Laos, where American support of a neutralist regime seemed to be leading to an eventual communist takeover.

I told President Kennedy I thought that in both Laos and Cuba the important thing was to take some affirmative action, including, if necessary, at least a commitment of American air power.

He said, "I just don't think we ought to get involved in Laos, particularly where we might find ourselves fighting millions of Chinese troops in the jungles." His next remark underlined how the failure to come to grips with communism in one part of the world has weakened our position in every other part of the world. "In any event," he said, "I don't see how we can make any move in Laos, which is 5000 miles away, if we don't make a move in

Cuba, which is only 90 miles away."

I replied, "This, of course, is a decision which only you can make, in the light of your information as to what our strength is and your intelligence reports on enemy strength and intentions. I want to tell you that I will publicly support you to the hilt if you make such a decision in regard to either Laos or Cuba, and I will urge all other Republicans to do likewise. I realize that some political observers say you might risk political defeat in 1964 if either the Cuban or Far East crises involves an American armed forces commitment. I want you to know that I am one who will never make that a political issue if such action becomes necessary."

His reply, in the light of what happened three years later, was prophetic, although I do not think he intended it that way. "The way things are going and with all the problems we have, if I do the right kind of a job, I don't know whether I am going to be here four years from now."

I was not sure at the time what he meant by this. I assumed that President Kennedy foresaw that he might now have to take risky military action. And with the Bay of Pigs failure fresh in his mind, he realized that another such defeat could be disastrous for him politically in 1964. Nevertheless, he said firmly, "You can be sure the political consequences will have no effect on the decision I make in this crisis."

By that time we had talked for al-

most an hour. He took me out the side door to one of the White House cars which he had ordered to be sent for me, and which was waiting in the driveway on the South Lawn. As we walked to the car, he threw out another strangely prophetic remark: "I hope you take the time to write a book. It's really a good idea, even if it sells only a few copies. There's something about being an author which really builds the reputation of a political figure. Look what *The Conscience of a Conservative* has done for Barry Goldwater!"

We shook hands, and he turned and walked back up the path to his office. As he walked away, his head bowed, his hands jammed characteristically into his pockets, he seemed literally to be carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders. As I watched his weary, stooped figure, usually so erect and buoyant, disappear into the terrible loneliness of the White House office, I had an overwhelming sense of how depressed and discouraged he must have felt. I realize that political figures are not supposed to experience ordinary emotions—particularly where their political opponents are concerned. But I can truthfully say that, in this darkest hour of his political career, my heart went out to my friend, Jack Kennedy, the man who had come to Congress the same year I did, 14 years before.

The Lesson of the Bay of Pigs

THEODORE ROOSEVELT's daughter, Alice Longworth, once told me,

"Father never believed in the old saying, 'Don't cry over spilled milk.' He always said, 'Of course you cry over spilled milk—you cry and you stamp up and down to make sure you don't spill it again!'"

Because Cuba is a classic example of how not to conduct foreign policy in dealing with the communists, it is essential that we see where we went wrong in the past in order to determine what policy we should adopt in the future.

There are two major lessons to be learned from the Bay of Pigs:

First, when a decision has been made to commit American prestige, we must be prepared to commit an adequate amount of American power. As former Secretary of State James Byrnes, whose 82nd birthday celebration I attended shortly after the Bay of Pigs crisis, said, "We Americans must not begin anything we aren't prepared to finish."

Second, American foreign policy must always be dictated by the security interests of the United States, and not by some vague concept of "world public opinion." The United States should always have a concern for the opinions of our friends in other nations. But, as the strongest nation in the world, it is our responsibility to lead, not to follow, the forces charged with the defense of freedom.

In the Kremlin, Khrushchev must have watched with interest America's inept and fainthearted efforts to free Cuba. He drew his own conclusions from the spectacle, and he

now had good reason to doubt our resolve to stand up for our own interests. As he later said to Robert Frost, "The Americans are too liberal to fight."

The Cuban Missile Crisis

A FEW months afterward, on June 4, 1961, Khrushchev had an opportunity to size up the new President and his advisers, at Vienna. Whatever his impression may have been, it is clear from the entire chain of events that our failure at the Bay of Pigs led directly to the Soviet decision to move into the Western Hemisphere in force, with both men and missiles.

The history of this infamous and secret action by Khrushchev has been recorded elsewhere,* but it is perhaps instructive to note that once again the powerful State Department clique and the "liberal" members of the White House staff chose to ignore warnings, chiefly by the CIA and by Sen. Kenneth Keating, who repeatedly stated that Soviet forces of men and missiles were being landed in Cuba.

By October 16, 1962, there was no longer any doubt. The CIA laid on the President's desk photographs of Soviet missiles in place in Cuba. The photos had been taken by the CIA's U-2 planes, and the evidence could not be brushed aside.

On October 22, 1962, President Kennedy made his dramatic announcement that the Soviet Union

*See "While America Slept," The Reader's Digest, March '63.

CUBA, CASTRO AND JOHN F. KENNEDY

297

had secretly moved medium-range ballistic missiles and jet bombers into Cuba. He ordered a blockade, and demanded the removal of existing missiles, with on-site inspection to make certain that the job was done.

This was the finest hour of his Presidency. People, not only in this country but throughout the free world, applauded this forceful commitment of American strength to the defense of freedom and the cause of peace. By finally calling Khrushchev's bluff, President Kennedy assured his own place in history as the man who made nuclear blackmail an obsolete form of diplomacy.

But, again, the tragic history of American indecisiveness repeated itself. The persistent clique of advisers who had stayed Kennedy's hand at the Bay of Pigs began at once to nibble away at the new strong policy. They insisted that the whole dispute be turned over to the United Nations for negotiation and settlement. By convincing the President that he should back away from the strong course of action he had initially outlined, they enabled the United States to pull defeat out of the jaws of victory. These were the results of following their incredibly bad advice:

- There was no insistence on on-site inspection. "Offensive" missiles were apparently removed, but "defensive" missiles were allowed to remain.

- Not only were the Cuban exiles prohibited from engaging in further

harassing actions against Castro, but the United States became committed to a no-invasion policy.

- This weak-kneed foreign policy encouraged the enemy to bolder and bolder action. Shiploads of Soviet arms have continued to pour into Cuba—until today, except for the United States and Canada, the island is the strongest military power in the Western Hemisphere.

- Khrushchev's gamble in putting missiles into Cuba was merely another application of the time-tested communist doctrine—"Two steps forward, one step backward." The operation turned out to be a net gain for the Kremlin.

ON NOVEMBER 20, 1963, I flew to Dallas to attend a meeting with one of the clients of the New York law firm with which I am associated.

At an informal news conference, which I held on November 21, the questions were concerned chiefly with the visit of President Kennedy, who was scheduled to arrive in Dallas the following day. One of the questioners pointed out that considerable opposition had developed to some of the President's programs and that there might be some demonstrations against him and Vice President Johnson, who would be in the party. I urged, in a statement to the press which I later repeated on television, that the President and Vice President be shown the respect to which their offices entitled them. I stated, "Disagreement with his views is no excuse for discourtesy to

208

THE READER'S DIGEST

November

the office of President of the United States."

Castro and Lee Harvey Oswald

THE FOLLOWING morning, November 22, I boarded a plane to New York. We arrived on schedule at 12:56 after an uneventful flight. I hailed a cab and asked the driver to take me to my office. We were waiting for a light to change when a man ran over from the street corner and called out, "Do you have a radio in your cab?" The cab driver answered, "No. Why?" The man replied, "The President has just been shot in Dallas."

This is the way I learned the news of President Kennedy's assassination. I asked the cab driver to take me to my apartment rather than to my office. And then, for the next hour, I sat back in the cab wondering what had happened.

When we arrived at the apartment, the doorman told me that the news had just been flashed on television: the President had died.

I called J. Edgar Hoover, in Washington, and asked him what information he had. He told me that a Lee Harvey Oswald, known to the FBI as a member of the pro-Castro Fair Play for Cuba Committee, was the alleged assassin.

Oswald, without question, was a demented character who, according to the reports, had also tried to kill Gen. Edwin A. Walker and had threatened to make an attempt on my life as well. What brought him to this con-

dition is still unknown. But certainly one of the major factors which warped his mind and drove him to this terrible deed was his contact with communism generally, and with Castro's fanatical brand of communism in particular.

Fidel Castro, therefore, proved to be the most momentous figure in John F. Kennedy's life. It was Castro who provided the major foreign-policy issue in Kennedy's campaign for the Presidency; it was Castro who brought him to the lowest point of his career, at the Bay of Pigs; it was Castro who supplied the opportunity for Kennedy's greatest act of leadership as President, during the blockade; and, finally, Castro was an indirect cause of the tragic snuffing out of John Kennedy's life at a time when, by reason of experience, added to his keen intelligence, his great vision and vitality, he was coming into the most productive period of his leadership of the nation.

Where Are We Now?

THIS twisted and tragic chain of events brings us to 1964. Cuba, along with Vietnam, is the major foreign-policy issue of the 1964 Presidential campaign, as it was in 1960. Why is Cuba such a key issue? Precisely because it symbolizes our entire approach to the menace of communism, our entire approach to foreign policy.

The answer to the question of what we must do about Cuba can be determined only after we have found an answer to the much broader, all-

1964

CUBA, CASTRO AND JOHN F. KENNEDY

299

inclusive question: How does the United States propose to deal with communist aggression throughout the world? This is the actual foreign-policy issue we face today.

There is strong support in the State Department and in the administration for Senator Fulbright's view that Castro is not a danger but just a nuisance, and that we should be more flexible and more conciliatory in our policies toward the Soviet Union and other communist countries.

Those who urge a more flexible response to communism point out that there are difficulties in the communist bloc. There is a split between Communist China and the Soviet Union. There is the trouble that the Soviet Union is having with its satellites in Eastern Europe, whose people are overwhelmingly against their communist government. And there is the fact that communism, economically, has not been working in Soviet Europe or in Communist China or in Cuba or in the satellite countries.

Putting these developments together, those who formulate our foreign policy say that the world situation has changed in our favor. Noting the test-ban treaty, the sale of wheat to the Soviet Union and a less belligerent attitude by Khrushchev, they argue that the cold war is thawing and that a new period of accommodation with the communists is in order.

My own evaluation leads to a totally different conclusion. This is

no time to be complacent about our position in the world. The last four years have seen the greatest series of foreign-policy failures of any comparable period in our history. In Europe, the Grand Alliance is in a shambles, with several of our allies refusing to support the United States in our policy toward Latin America and Asia. In Germany, the Berlin Wall stands as a grim monument to American weakness and indecision in the face of a flagrant communist challenge. In Asia, Vietnam is only the most recent and most shocking of a series of foreign-policy disasters that has reduced American prestige to an all-time low in that part of the world. Laos is practically gone. Cambodia is going. Burma and Indonesia are on the brink.

In countries scattered around the world, acts of mobs descending on American embassies, stoning our representatives and tearing down the flag have become commonplace. We have been humiliated, frustrated, outguessed and outmaneuvered at every turn. In the face of this record, how can anyone in a responsible policy-making position say that the cold war is thawing?

The cold war isn't thawing; it is burning with a deadly heat. Communism isn't changing; it isn't sleeping; it isn't relaxing; it is, as always, plotting, scheming, working, fighting.

Soviet weapons are available to any group anywhere that is seeking to blow up the social order and

300

CUBA, CASTRO AND JOHN F. KENNEDY

create the chaos in which communism thrives. Thousands of young people from non-communist countries are today being trained in the arts of subversion—from the staging of riots to guerrilla tactics. In the bloodletting in Southeast Asia, Cyprus, the Congo, Yemen, British Guiana and in other areas, communists are directly or indirectly involved.

While the danger of destruction by total war has gone down, the danger of defeat without total war has gone up. Those who urge that we seek an "accommodation" with the communists fail to realize that when the communist leaders talk softly they are increasing their subversive and revolutionary activities. This is the situation with which the United States is presently confronted. It is a situation which calls for realistic thinking about communist strategy and tactics, and for a new policy to meet the threat that faces us.

We must understand that the communist threat is worldwide, and if communism takes over in one country the tremors are felt clear around the world. We need, therefore, a worldwide approach. I completely reject the idea that there are so-called peripheral areas, collateral areas—like Cuba and Vietnam—that are not important.

For world communist leaders the battle for Cuba is not about Cuba. It is about Latin America. And the

eventual target is the United States. Cuba, for example, is at our very doorstep. All the world looks on and sees that we do nothing to help our neighbors who are enslaved by a communist dictator. Is it any wonder that they are doubtful that we mean to resist communism in other parts of the world?

At this critical period, we must make up our minds that there cannot be one further retreat any place in the free world. We must have the military strength, the economic programs and the political-action programs to resist any further retreat. Rather than a policy of flexibility, of softening, of conciliation, we must have a strong and determined policy. We must let those in the target nations know that the non-communist world has had enough of this continued encroachment, and that we are now going to stand firm.

As I reflect on all that has happened in recent years, one thing stands out clearly: the troubles our nation has experienced have come when we have failed to stand firm against the communist dictators. We have too often backed down—and backed away. It is time for us to put an end to this disgraceful, self-defeating behavior. It is time to stand firm—and then move forward—in Cuba, in Vietnam and in any other area where freedom is denied or threatened by the forces of world communism.

